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REPORT ON OTHER MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Note by the Secretary-General

Contribution by the Third International Dialogue on the Transition to Global Society: Transition to a Just Society

1. The General Assembly, by means of resolution 46/116, requested the Secretary-General to report to the Preparatory Committee on progress made on meetings that had been organized under the auspices of the United Nations programme pursuant to General Assembly resolution 45/155.

2. By letter dated 31 March 1993, Mr. Wytze Bos, Representative to the United Nations of the Baha'i International Community, transmitted a copy of the report of the Third International Dialogue on the Transition to a Global society, held at the Landegg Academy, Wienacht, Switzerland, from 8 to 11 September 1992. He requested that the report be circulated as a document of the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee. The meeting adopted adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to the theme of the meeting which was "maintaining justice and protecting human rights as fundamental to the management of transition to a global society." Some 80 participants from 20 different countries took part in the discussions.

3. The Conference was co-sponsored by a number of non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Advocates, the Institute of International Education, the International Council of Women, the International Foundation for the Survival and Development of Humanity and the Baha'i International Community.

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REPORT ON THE THIRD ANNUAL DIALOGUE ON THE TRANSITION TO GLOBAL SOCIETY: TRANSITION TO A JUST SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

This, the third annual Dialogue on the Transition to a Global Society, was held at the Landegg Academy, Wienacht, Switzerland from September 8-11, 1992. Eighty participants from 20 countries attended. Presenters and responders included Supreme Court and Appellate Court Justices, judges, members of parliaments, statespersons, lawyers, educators, economists, and scientists from across the globe.

Guided by the hypothesis that the emergence of a global society is inevitable in the evolution of human order, these dialogues explore concepts and perspectives which are essential to the process of planning for a peaceful and beneficial transition to a global community. Without such planning, the global society which evolves is unlikely to reflect the highest hopes of its members.

In the atmosphere of these dialogues it is possible to discover and analyze points, both of agreement and contest, to the end that resolution of conflict can take place before the ideas are encountered in hardened structures or irreconcilable doctrines.

The dialogue immediately embraced the concept that the chaos rampant in present society makes it possible for small forces of thought and persuasion to exert a vastly disproportionate influence upon the evolution of human order. Just such gatherings as this can produce a significant change in the unfolding of social progress.

THE MEANING OF JUSTICE

The transition to a just society was seen as the prized essential precursor to the arrival of true global order. The meaning of the term "justice" was found to be elusive. The elements of a just society were more easily determined. These elements were identified and examined in detail. The elements most commonly stressed and recognized as inextricably intertwined with universal human rights were:

1. The rule of law and institutional justice.
2. Freedom of thought, expression and action.
3. Economic justice.
4. Racial justice.
5. Equality of women and men.
6. Environmental and prospective justice.
7. The contribution and detraction of religious practice.

THE RULE OF LAW AND INSTITUTIONAL JUSTICE

No system can maintain justice as a standard without the acceptance of the rule of law as the upholder of that standard. The discussion of this issue centred upon the requirement for constitutional authority upheld by an unfettered parliament, a free press and guaranteed protection of the right of individual participation. Institutions must be the guardians of freedom and the balancers of competing rights. They must be equipped to forestall disputes or to adjudicate them fairly and swiftly using new or innovative alternatives as well as time tested adjudicatory techniques. Sensible non-adversarial approaches to problem solving and dispute resolution should receive great attention by leaders of thought. Children and youth must be trained to settle disputes fairly and in such a manner as will best leave the parties without rancor.

In this discussion, as in every other segment, without fail, education was pronounced to be a critical need. If there is any element without which a just society could not evolve or survive, that element is education.

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, EXPRESSION AND ACTION

Although freedom of thought, expression and action were universally accepted as a postulate, there was considerable discussion concerning the limits which might legitimately be placed upon freedom of expression and action. Thoughts varied widely as to appropriateness of censorship and the need to preserve public morals, peace, dignity and the like. In the main it was agreed that freedom of neither expression nor action can be absolute, but the subject of what limits ought to be placed upon the limits to these freedoms is an important item for detailed consultation. Limitation only where necessary to protect against violence or public disorder is the emerging theme from this dialogue.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Justice in the economic sphere was discussed as implying far more than simply the elimination of poverty. Overcoming the incapacitating effect of the extremes of wealth and poverty was, of course, a central theme. But more important to the dialogue than effecting the mere redistribution of the goods and services extant is the concern for the full development of human potential. This development includes the overriding concern for universal education, especially for women, and the need to remove restraints, barriers and prejudices which retard the emergence of the full range of talents and faculties of individuals. Only when every human being, regardless of sex, race or status has his or her full potential made available to the whole civilization can it be said that justice has prevailed. Furthermore, universal systems of protection, delivery and finance must be developed and exploited in order to correct the imbalance created by national and regional insularity and acquisitiveness. New assessments are required of the actual needs of people and a new moral commitment invoked which will eradicate the market for destructive goods and pernicious services.

RACIAL JUSTICE

Any plan for a just society must provide for the elimination of racism. Not only must society come to an understanding of the roots of this baneful evil, but we must evolve the means to promote racial unity and concord, to celebrate contributions born of diversity and recognize the moral imperative of oneness to a just society. Laws must conform absolutely to the principle of equality in all aspects of life. But there also must be a fundamental change in human character which internalizes and fastens this concept forever in every individual conscience. To this end, models of inter-group cooperation and harmony must be applauded and supported. Children must be shown the beauty of diversity and how to welcome different looks, approaches and thoughts. Hundreds of years of hate and discrimination could thus be reversed in a single generation.

Differential education, poverty and political and social expediency which preserve advantage and exclusivity are acknowledged as inimical to a just society. All legal and moral means to eradicate these affronts should be marshaled and utilized.

EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

The entry of women into the policy making forums of the world is held by this dialogue to be vital to a just society. The recognition of the complementary yet equal roles of women and men was discussed as a much needed departure from the present culture in virtually every area of the globe. Despite the attention given to the rights of women by the United Nations and other international agencies, real progress, as opposed to rhetoric, has been scarce. Prompt and consistent attention must be given to the education of girls throughout the world. Poverty must cease to work its heavy and disproportionate limit upon the choices available to women. Men must arise to the eradication of this unjust inequality.

ENVIRONMENT

A society which cripples the future in homage to short term profit cannot deserve to be called just. The rational and economical development of assets which yield the necessities of life is an unquestioned human right of every human being. The means and will must be found to curtail the unnecessary and wasteful pillaging of the environment to serve the self-indulgence of a very small percentage of the total population. Again education is essential to the proper utilization of the earth's resources and the key to preservation and replenishment. Changes are required in the means of production which will protect against environmental pollution and ecological instability. The will to act must be supported by international law and a general moral acceptance.

During the discussion of the environment, a theme was recalled as being a common thread which ran through all discussions. The connecting idea was that of the need for a global authority to make effective the laws, and assure the appropriate conduct, to produce a just society.

RELIGION

Basic human freedoms include the right to believe or not to believe in God. No threat to a just society is seen in the exercise of the right to believe. Where peril is presented to a just society is in the form of the discussions the group had settled upon the notion that no right or freedom in a just society could be absolute. Some limitation upon freedom of religious practice is similarly justified. Continued dialogue along these lines is clearly justified. International law should also concern itself with religious pluralism and anti-social practices.

The value of religion as a source of moral guidance and restraint is acknowledged. In the discussion of every facet of an emerging just society consideration has been given to the necessity for a moral climate necessary to sustain the principles of justice. Absent the general will to behave according to law, there is no hope that the rule of law itself will prevail. Enmity, intolerance and violence cannot be countenanced on any grounds and religion should never be the agent of these evils. In the final analysis, the rule of law cannot depend only upon external enforcement but must be upheld by a common morality. Where this morality is supported by religious practice, the common good is attained. Where it is not, there should be a dialogue concerning the source of common moral values to the end that competing religious expressions should move together to the higher ground of unity.

CONCLUSION

1. The institutions and organizations that constitute society have a primary role to play in safe-guarding and protecting the rights of the population, and therefore deserve to be strengthened. Essential elements in any system that seeks to maintain justice and safeguard and promote human rights include a constitutional authority, capable of enforcing the rule of law, and itself upheld by an unfettered parliament and a free press. Institutions must be equipped to settle disputes or to adjudicate between the parties involved, fairly and swiftly, using new or innovative alternatives in addition to time-honoured techniques. To this end decision-makers and leaders of thought should be encouraged to adopt sound non-adversarial approaches to problem solving and dispute resolution, and to direct attention towards the training of children and youth in these methods.

2. In the transition to a just, global society, due consideration needs to be given to the fostering of a moral climate that will sustain the principles of justice. A just society, upholding the rule of law, can only be maintained when there is the will to enforce and apply moral principles to the governance of human affairs. The recognition of the common source and foundation of moral values, achieved through inter-religious dialogue, will provide a peaceful environment for the application of such principles.

3. Education is an essential element without which a just society, upholding and guaranteeing the rights of all its citizens, could not evolve or survive. It is only through universal education that the sense of belonging to a common human family will be implanted in future generations, thus enabling society to become free of all forms of discrimination. Universal systems should be developed in order to ensure that this kind of education, without exception, is guaranteed to all.

4. The entry of women into the policy-making forums of the world is vital to the emergence and sustenance of such a just society. To this end prompt and consistent attention needs to be given to the education of girls throughout the world, if women are to be able to take up their rightful places in the forefront of society.